

WHAT IS MARRIAGE – Genesis 2:18-25

Focus

Marriage as you know, often gets a lot of bad press. Jokes abound about marriage. Maybe you have heard some of these:

- Marriage is like a bath – once you've been in it for a while – it's not so hot.
- Marriage is not a word. It is a sentence--a life sentence.
- Marriage is very much like a violin; after the sweet music is over, the strings are attached.
- Marriage is an institution in which a man loses his Bachelor's Degree and the woman gets her Masters.

To kick off our new series on Love & Marriage I want to say something positive about marriage – because marriage is God's idea.

Genesis 2 is really a foundational and fundamental passage about marriage. The truths presented here in Genesis are the basis for all that Paul and Jesus taught about marriage in the NT. If you want to know what your marriage ought to be like you need to begin in Genesis 2. Someone declared – *“Only if we understand the teaching of the book of Genesis will be able to build a biblical view of marriage.”*

So let's take a look at God's teaching about marriage as outlined in Genesis 2:18-25. Note that these words were given before sin entered into the world. These words express the ideals of what God had in mind when He created Adam and Eve and marriage.

¹⁸The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

¹⁹Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam^[a] no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs^[b] and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib^[c] he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³*The man said,*

*"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,'
for she was taken out of man."*

²⁴*That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife,
and they become one flesh.*

²⁵*Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.*

There are a few fundamental and important truths about marriage here:

A/ MARRIAGE IS COMPANIONSHIP

People get married for different reasons. Some get married for money. Perhaps they never heard the advice of one person who said – *"Don't get married for money, you can borrow it cheaper"*. Others have gotten married to have children, or because a child was already on the way.

But a primary reason God created marriage for - was for companionship. Marriage is God's response to man's loneliness. God stated it in Genesis 2:18 – *"it is not good for man to be alone"*.

As God was creating the world He paused at the end of each day and said – *"It is good."* But after He created Adam on day 6 God said – *"It is not good – for the man to be alone."* So God took a part of Adam, his rib, and created Eve. This is a beautiful picture of companionship. It takes a part of us to be a companion to another. Companionship in marriage is only possible when we are willing to give a part of ourselves.

Now, before you ask the question, let me do so. What about those who are not married? Does this mean they cannot know and enjoy companionship?

No. The principle of this passage is still the same. God created us as social beings. We need other people. Loneliness is a killer feeling. This is why the church – the family of God and the bride of Christ – is so important in God's program too. God created us for relationship.

But Genesis 2 is also suggesting that there is something special about the relationship God created between a man and a woman in marriage. It is to be a relationship of companionship.

The reformer and former Catholic priest Martin Luther got it right when he said – *"There is no more lovely, friendly and charming relationship, communion or company than a good marriage."*

On January 28, 1955 James Bracy wrote a love letter to his new bride. He was stationed at a California military base a thousands miles away but kept in touch with his sweetheart through letters.

Somehow this one letter got lost. It became lodged between 2 walls in Fort Ord's mailroom in San Francisco. Years later as workers were dismantling this old post office, they found the letter. They tracked down Sallie Bracy and delivered the letter to her days after the couple celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. As Sallie read the letter tears welled up in her eyes and she said she felt like a love-struck 22 year old all over again. She also said – *"It meant a lot to me then. It means even more to me now."* Their companionship had grown for 50 years.

Sadly the opposite can also be true. We can take one another for granted. This too is a true story. I cut this out of the paper a while ago. A guy by the name of John Powell was driving along the highway en route to Alaska. The police pulled him over and asked if he forgot something important when he stopped at the service station 50 kilometers ago. A look of horror came over his face as he turned to discover his wife was not there in the van. He didn't notice that she had gotten out at the gas station to go to the bathroom.

Marriage is to be a loving and lasting companionship. In order for that to happen we need to work at it by consistently giving something of yourself to your spouse.

B/ MARRIAGE IS COMMITMENT

Some today chose to write up their own marriage contracts. They meet with their respective lawyers and detail the *"what ifs"*, *"ands"*, and *"buts"*. God wrote the terms of a marriage contract as well in Genesis 2. He kept it very simple. It is summarized by the 2 verbs of v24. In the NIV it is *"leave"* and *"unite"*. In the KJV the words are translated – *"leave"* and *"cleave"*. These words speak of commitment.

1/ WE MAKE A COMMITMENT TO A PRIORITY RELATIONSHIP

The key word here is *"leave"*. The previous ties of parents are broken and new ties to one another are formed. Marriage needs to be a priority relationship. It takes precedence over all others including the previous ties with parents.

My mom told me when Margo and I were about to get married that the best thing they did for their marriage was to move 1,000 miles away from family. She understood there needs to be a leaving.

This leaving does not have to be physical, but certainly emotional. Statistics and my experience in counseling tell me that some of the key killers of a new marriage are meddling mothers and forceful fathers. Don't allow that to happen in your marriage. Don't be that in your kid's marriage. Marriage needs to be a priority relationship to one another above everyone else.

Even over our children. One of the best things we can do for our children is to be a good husband or wife to our spouse. That is the priority relationship.

Flight attendants give these instructions to airline passengers: *"For those traveling with small children, in the event of an oxygen failure, first place the mask on your own face and then place the mask on your child's face."* In the same way we make our family stronger by first ensuring an oxygen supply of love between husband and wife.

The marriage bond takes precedence over other things as well. It is more important than work, career, bigger house, better car, golf, hockey, and even church work. I'm not

saying we ignore children and other people and things, but in God's scheme of things they all come second.

There was an interesting article in the Toronto Star a while back with an interview with family and marriage counselor Mario Bartaletti. He had some advice for married couples: *"Have an affair about 5 years after you get married. Of course"*, he added with a sly grin, *"that affair should be with your spouse."* *"Too often"*, he went on to say, *"in our fast-paced world, courtship disappears soon after the wedding bells stop ringing. And when the romance dies, there's a very good chance the marriage will too."*

Someone else once said – *"If men acted after marriage the way they acted before they were married, there would be half as many divorces today. Although, there would probably be twice as many bankruptcies too."*

2 WE MAKE A COMMITMENT TO A PERMANENT RELATIONSHIP

The word *"unite"* or *"cleave"* suggests permanence. The same word is used in the OT to describe the way leprosy *"clings"* to a person's body. It was considered to be a permanent disease. The Greek word used by the NT writers to express this was one that described gluing things together, or a bonding, or cementing. This is what God meant the relationship between a bride and groom to be like.

I'm not much of a carpenter, but I know that if you want a good strong join there are a few steps to take. First, you make sure the 2 pieces fit together well. You may need to sand off some rough edges. You may want to dovetail the 2 pieces so they fit really well. Then you glue them and clamp the 2 pieces together. You end up with a join that is permanent. It is the same for marriage.

In an article called – Love Being Married – Jane Struck wrote these words: *"With two decades of marriage to my husband, Rich, under my belt, I've learned marriage is a wondrous mix of joy and sorrow. Rich and I have struggled through the challenges of raising teenagers, battling cancer, surviving a layoff, losing a sibling, undergoing a relocation that didn't pan out, and a number of other ups and downs. We've been childish, selfish, and said things we both regret. Those are the times when we grit our teeth and hold tight to the commitment we made before God, friends, and family so long ago."*

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At a wedding ceremony a bride and groom traditionally say to one another words that speak of the permanence of the marriage relationship:

*"I take you to be my wedded wife or husband,/ to have and to hold from this day forward,/ for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer,/ in sickness and in health,/ to love and to cherish, **till death separates us.**"*

Our society practices easy divorce. Pastor Stephen will address the topic of divorce next week. But before we talk about divorce we first we need to understand what God is outlining in Genesis 2. He is outlining the ideal and the permanent commitment that a bride and groom should make to one another at their wedding and every day after that.

I heard on a radio talk show the title of a book on marriage. It was *"Incompatibility, Grounds For a Great Marriage"*. Isn't that great! Two people who get married are

different people. But these differences can become an opportunity for growth together when there is first a commitment to a permanent relationship.

C/ MARRIAGE IS COMMUNION

Marriage is not only a union of 2 people, it is also a communion. This is what God is saying in Genesis 2:24,25.

²⁴That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

²⁵Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

The goal of the marriage bond is to become “*one flesh*”. What does this mean? It does not just refer to the sexual union of a man and a woman. It refers also to 2 persons sharing everything they have – bodies, possessions, thoughts, feelings, joys, sufferings, hopes, fears, failures, and successes.

One person put it this way: *“The wedding is merely the beginning of a lifelong process of handing over absolutely everything, and not simply everything that one owns, but everything that one is.”*

This is symbolized in v25 by nakedness. There is complete transparency and openness, there is no shame, no blushing. There is only perfect comfort and acceptance of one another. It is a wonderful communion. Jane Struck again speaks of this in her article:

“While Rich can't read my mind, he does know how to read my body language. He knows the particular glance I use at social functions that says, I'm ready to book out of here immediately! He recognizes the powerful phrase we always use as an ice-breaker after an argument: "Do you love me anyway?" Together Rich and I have coined funny nicknames for ourselves, our kids, even our dog ("triangle head"—don't ask). We have private jokes that crack us up—and only us. Through the years, we've created an elaborate context of Rich-and-Jane-isms that demonstrate one way we've become one flesh (Genesis 2:24). After all, part of what binds you together are the unique looks, gestures, phrases, and memories you build together.”

“The truth is, Rich and I don't have a perfect marriage because we're imperfect people. We each entered into our union with unique baggage and unrealistic expectations that still crop up after all the years. But if given the opportunity, I'd marry Rich again in a heartbeat.”

In his book, *The Essence of Marriage*, Julius Fritze describes marriage this way:

“Marriage is an emotional fusion of 2 personalities into a functional operation, yet both retaining their own identities.” He went on to illustrate the marriage relationship by talking about 2 lumps of clay. If you hold a lump of light green clay in your right hand and a lump of dark green clay in your left hand you can see the different shades. But if you take both of these lumps and mold and push them together, you would see just one lump of green clay – at first glance. But if you inspect it closely you will still be able to find the distinct and separate pieces of light and dark green clay. This is a good picture of 2 becoming one as Genesis 2 speaks of.

CONCLUSION

I like what Max Lucado summarized about marriage:

“God created marriage. No government subcommittee envisioned it. No social organization developed it. Marriage was conceived and born in the mind of God.”

This is the truth God outlines for us in Genesis 2. God created marriage. He created it for unique companionship, a wonderful communion, and based on a lasting commitment to one another. Jesus reaffirmed them in Matthew 19:4-6.

⁴*“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,^[a]’⁵ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh^[b]?’⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”*